

Henry Willibrand Brewery
700 block Main Street
Alexandria
Huntingdon County
Pennsylvania

HABS No. PA-5409

HABS
PA,
31-ALEX,
30-

PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, DC 20013-7127

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

HENRY WILLIBRAND BREWERY

HABS No. PA-5409

Location: 700 Block, Main Street, Alexandria, Porter Township, Huntingdon County, Pennsylvania.

Present Owner: William L. and Nancy B. Howe.

Present Use: Apartment building.

Significance: The Willibrand Brewery was one an important commercial enterprise in Alexandria from the inception of the canal era until at least mid-century, into the period dominated by the railroad. It reflects the lucrative brewing and distilling industry that thrived in Pennsylvania into the early twentieth century. Although the building has been adapted for residential use, it is one of the few buildings in the borough that serves as a reminder of its industrial heritage.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: ca. 1824 or ca. 1833; in 1824 Henry Willibrand advertised his brewery in Alexandria. He may have been renting from the previous owner, James Trimble, or the brewery could have been located elsewhere in Alexandria, since Willibrand did not gain title to the land until 1829.

In 1833 he advertised his brewery again: Either Willibrand tore down the existing facility to build anew, or he made additions to it.

2. Original and subsequent owners: The building is set 80' back from the street, situated on two lots that front 120' on the south side of Main Street, and extend back 180' to an alley. It is located in the western end of the borough, two lots from the southwestern boundary line.

The following is an incomplete chain of title to the land on which the structure stands. Reference is to the Recorder of Deeds Office of the County of Huntingdon, Pennsylvania.

1829 Deed 1829, recorded in Volume F2, Page 263.

Dr. James Trimble and wife

TO

Henry Willibrand.

1835 Henry Willibrand is first listed in the tax records of Porter Township, Huntingdon County, as owning "1 Brewery and 2 lots."

1840 Deed September 1, 1840, recorded in Volume F2, Page 264.

Henry Willibrand (Orphans Court docket)

TO

HABS
PA,
31-ALEX,
30-

Henry and John Fockler (John later sold his half to Henry).

- 1856 Deed May 2, 1856, recorded in Volume M2, Page 147.
Henry Fockler
TO
Philip M. Piper and Nicholas Isenberg.
- 1864 According to Harshbarger, in August or September 1864, an article in the Huntingdon Globe noted that E.O. Colder has purchased the interest of T. Newell in this establishment and it would henceforth operate as E.O. Colder and Company. No deed was found to support this.
- 1873 Deed February 22, 1873, recorded in Volume D3, Page 420.
Samuel T. and Sarah J. Brown, and John M. Bailey and Lettie F. Bailey
TO
Jacob Hoffman (one-third), G. Estep (one-third), B. Neff (one-third).
- 1877 Estep and Hoffman's combined two-thirds interest was deeded to Robert E. Speer, probably on April 18, 1877, but the records are unclear.
- 1879 Deed April 21, 1879, recorded in Volume M4, Page 346.
Benjamin Neff (one-third)
TO
Peter Harnish.
- 1898 Deed September 7, 1898, recorded in Sheriff's Book 2, Page 403.
Union National Bank of Huntingdon for Peter Harnish estate (one-third)
TO
E.S. McMurtrie ("formerly Brew House, now occupied as a residence").
- 1899 McMurtrie and Speer sold to John H. Hutchison separately in 1899 (Volume P4, Page 324).
- 1902 Deed March 3, 1902, recorded in Volume S4, Page 202.
John H. Hutchison (full interest)
TO
George R. Hutchison.
- 1940-85 Various owners used the building as separate apartments.
- 1985 Deed May 28, 1985, recorded in Volume 182, Page 32.
Peter Simpson (trustee for Shawn, Greg, and Andrew Simpson)
TO
William and Nancy Howe.

3. Original plans and construction: No original plans or drawings have been

located. Originally the house was probably without porches except, perhaps, for one over the front two doors. It was a simple, commercial two-story building with a side-gabled roof. One large room occupied the western section of the first floor for the brewing operation, adjacent to which was an office in the eastern section.

4. Alterations and additions: The building has been remodeled into four apartments; no original brewery equipment remains. The building has been increased to two-and-a-half stories through the addition of cross-gable dormers. The attic and cellar are relatively intact.

- B. Historical Context: Brewing and distilling, founded as cottage industries, were significant and lucrative enterprises beginning in the Colonial era and continuing into the twentieth century. Western Pennsylvania distilleries found a good market in the rapidly expanding Midwest frontier, with exports down the Ohio River reaching 100,000 gallons annually by 1794.

Whiskey was one of the leading commodities carried on the varied river craft that traversed the Susquehanna, Juniata, and connecting waterways prior to the Civil War. After 1850 the number of small distilleries declined as production centered in larger, specialized facilities such as those in Alexandria. In 1860, for instance, there were 182 producers of malt liquors in Pennsylvania; in 1870 there were 246 breweries in the state. By 1900, Pennsylvania had 281 distilleries and breweries.

In 1824 Willibrand advertised his brewery in Alexandria, possibly at a site previous to this one. In an 1833 Huntingdon Gazette advertisement, Willibrand announced that his new brewery was operating in Alexandria, headed by a brewer from Philadelphia. Willibrand did not long enjoy his new operation, however, for in 1835 he drowned in the canal lock while substituting for a sick lock-keeper (Harshbarger, 25).

The succession of men who owned or had an interest in the brewery defined themselves by different professions. According to the 1850 census, two P. Pipers, ages 54 and unknown, were farmers; Henry Fockler, 37, was a brewer; and Jacob Hoffman, 50, a merchant. Yet, in 1860 Hoffman is listed as a miller and Nicholas Isenberg, 38, a brewer; in 1870 Isenberg is identified as an auctioneer. The 1880 census lists 48-year-old Peter Piper as a carpenter, and 31-year-old Jacob Hoffman as a wagonmaker. In 1873 the business was operated as the Alexandria Brewery. Until at least 1879, the property included a stable and other outbuildings, according to the deed between Benjamin Neff and Peter Harnish. The site may have served as a brewery upto 1880.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: The Willibrand Brewery is a vernacular industrial brick building distinguished by its relatively large utilitarian mass and uniform wall openings, despite modern alterations.
2. Condition of the fabric: Fair.

2. Condition of the fabric: Fair.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Overall dimensions: The brewery is 81' x 35'. The two front porches, probably added when the building was remodeled into apartments, are both 27' x 5'. The side porch on the east facade is 15' x 7'. The rear porch on the southeast section is 16' x 6'. The southwest corner porch is 43' x 6'.
2. Foundation: Cut stone.
3. Wall construction: Red brick laid in Flemish bond on the front facade; common-bond courses on the east (and probably west and rear) facades.
4. Structural system, framing: Load-bearing brick.
5. Porches: Five porches have been added to the building during its conversion into apartments. Two in the front, one on the east end, and two on the rear facade of the building. Each porch is functional, with a shed roof of sheet metal over wood, and little or no adornment. The east porch is enclosed frame. All flooring, steps, and railings are wood.
6. Chimneys: There is currently one exterior chimney on the west gable end; in 1976 there were three chimneys.
7. Openings:
 - a. Doorways and doors: Doorways and modern aluminum doors have been added to the main facade to provide access to each of the four apartments. The two original door openings are in the northwest corner of the building, and three bays east of that. The wood doors are paneled.
 - b. Windows: The five windows in the east end of the facade, as well as some along the first floor, feature two-over-two-light double-hung sash; the eight paired second-story windows in the west section are one-over-one-light modern aluminum sash, as are three first-floor windows. The three windows on the east-end wall (first floor) are double-hung, four-over-four-light wood sash. Modern dormers each feature small, one-over-one-light windows. There are no shutters.
8. Roof:
 - a. Shape, covering: Gable-end with three cross-gable dormers on front facade; all covered with sheet metal.
 - b. Cornice: Wood box cornice with gutter.

- C. Description of Interior: Much altered.
- D. Site: The brewhouse is located at the western end of Alexandria, surrounded by residences on the north, east, and west sides. To the south is a gravel parking lot, beyond which are fields. A stable and other original outbuildings are gone.

PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

- A. Old view (in Hartslog Heritage, 36).
- B. Primary and unpublished sources:

Porter Township tax records, 1819 to 1859, Huntingdon County Historical Society.

Alexandria Borough tax records, 1859 to 1873, Huntingdon County Historical Society and Huntingdon County Courthouse.

Huntingdon County Deed Books and Probate Records, Huntingdon County Courthouse, Huntingdon, Pennsylvania.

Huntingdon County Tax Map -- Alexandria, 01-01-44.

Huntingdon County Historical Society survey sheets.

Harshbarger, Jean. "Historic Homes in Alexandria, PA." Walking-tour brochure, no date.

- C. Secondary and published sources:

Africa, J. Simpson. History of Huntingdon and Blair Counties, Pennsylvania. Philadelphia: Louis H. Everts, 1883.

Harshbarger, Jean P., Nancy R. Taylor, Sara H. Zabriskie, and F.R. Zabriskie. Hartslog Heritage. State College, Pennsylvania: K-B Offset Printing, Inc., 1975.

PART IV. PROJECT INFORMATION

This project was conducted by the Historic American Buildings Survey/Historic American Engineering Record in cooperation with the America's Industrial Heritage Project under the directorship of Randy Cooley; AIHP is an undertaking of the National Park Service, based in Hollidaysburg, Pennsylvania. Recorded under the direction of Robert J. Kapsch, chief of HABS/HAER, the project was completed during summer 1988 at the HABS field office in Johnstown, Pennsylvania. Project leader was Alison K. Hoagland, senior HABS historian; field supervisor was Dorothy Burlingame, University of Vermont; project historian, Karen Genskow, Sangamon State University. Large-format photography is by David Ames. Editing of the final report was done by Sara Amy Leach, HABS historian.

This report was completed as part of a larger project documenting two canal towns--Saltsburg, on the Western Division of the Pennsylvania Mainline Canal, and Alexandria, on the Juniata Division--flanking the Allegheny Divide. Twenty-one reports on other buildings in Alexandria, an overview history of Alexandria (HABS No. PA-5407), and of canal town development in Pennsylvania (HABS No. PA-5666) are part of the HABS/HAER collection. Twenty-two reports on buildings in Saltsburg (Indiana County) and an overview history of Saltsburg (HABS No. PA-5438) are also available. Results of the project were published as Two Historic Pennsylvania Canal Towns: Alexandria and Saltsburg, Sara Amy Leach, editor (Washington, DC: Historic American Buildings Survey/Historic American Engineering Record, National Park Service, March 1989).